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ENG 4903-001: The Literature of Adolescence

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English 4903-001
The Literature of Adolescence
Spring 1997
Instructor: John David Moore
Classroom: CH 232
Time: TR 2:00-3:15
Office: CH 322
Office Hours: TR 9:00-11:00; MW 9:00-10:00 & by appt.
Phone: 6976; 348-0083 before 9:00 p.m.

Course Description and Objectives: What is adolescent literature? Is it even possible to talk about such a thing? Is it a genuine genre or literary tradition? Or is it merely the jerrybuilt invention of categorizing educators and late twentieth-century marketing magicians? How is the literature usually grouped in this category any different from children's literature? From Adult literature? Do we ever even tend to think of such a thing as "adult literature" as a distinct category?

These will be among the questions considered in this course. While thinking about such questions, we will be examining a wide range of literary works, from the Eighteenth Century to the present, connected to adolescents as readers and as subject matter. Through discussion and written analysis, the course will provide an understanding of representative literary works in this "tradition" as well as an awareness of the problems involved in defining such a tradition. Finally, the course will offer an understanding on the cultural/historical evolution of the idea of adolescence as reflected in the literature associated with this period of youth.

Course Policies and Requirements: Your achievement in the course will be evaluated on the basis of the following requirements:

First, you will be expected to be active in class discussion

Second, you will write two 10-12 page papers, one due at midterm and one due by the final class session. The first paper will focus on critical analysis of a text from the course reading list. The second paper will involve a discussion of literature not included on the course reading list, and a 5-7 minute presentation of your topic to the class.

Third, each student will be required to make a 15-20 minute oral presentation on material supplemental to the reading list but related to the topics of a given class period. You will be expected to hand in a written outline or set of notes for your presentation.

Fourth, for each class session you will be expected to write and turn in a one page reading response in the form of possible discussion questions covering the assigned text.

Fifth, you will take a final essay exam which will allow you to display your understanding of the literature covered in the course and your ability to discuss that literature within its cultural and historical contexts and in relation to the arguments that surround the definition of such literature.

In addition to the above requirements, students enrolled in the course for graduate credit will submit a final 12-15 page term paper focusing on a particular theme, genre, and/or critical issue and incorporating a selection of works not included on the syllabus. These students will be asked at midterm to submit a prospectus and bibliography for this final paper. The topic for this paper may overlap with or expand upon the oral presentation topic. **Note:** No late work will be accepted unless extensions have been approved by me before the date the work is due.

Grades: You will receive a single grade for your complete collection of reading response questions, and this will count equally with the grades for the two papers, the grade for the oral presentation, and the grade for the final exam. These five grades (six grades for graduate credit) will be averaged to arrive at your final grade, which may be adjusted up or down on the basis of your attendance and participation. **NOTE: All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.**

English Department Statement on Plagiarism: "Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism -- 'The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work' -- has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course."

Information for Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Course Outline

I. Introduction

Jan. 7&8 Introduction to problems of defining adolescent literature. Problems in mapping a history of adolescence.

II. Adolescent Reading: In Search of a Tradition

Jan. 14&16 Defoe: Robinson Crusoe
Discussion/background: Rousseau and the ideology of independence in relation to maturation.
History of Defoe's novel as a literature of youth.

Jan. 21&23 Charlotte Bronte: Jane Eyre
Discussion/background: The novel as "high art" prototype of popular romance fiction. Ideas of "girlhood" and womanhood in 19th-century culture.

Jan. 28&30 Stevenson: Treasure Island
Discussion/background: The development of the "boy's book."
The adventure novel as sub-genre. Maturation as adjustment/repression.

Feb. 4&6 Twain: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Discussion/background: The adolescent as outsider. The adolescent perspective and social critique. Twain and "boyhood" reading.

III. Adolescence as Theme: Rites of Passage, Rebellion, etc.

Feb. 11&13 Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet
Discussion/background: Themes of age vs. youth. Tragic dimensions in the idea of adolescence. The tradition of Shakespeare for adolescents.

Feb. 18&20 Alcott: Little Women
Discussion/background: Development of domestic novels for girls.
Feminine rites of passage in the Nineteenth Century.

Feb. 25&27 **First Paper Due**
Kipling: Stalky & Co.
Discussion/background: The sub-genre of the "School Story."
The ideology of adolescence in 19th-century education. Ideology of the British Public School system. Cultural ideals of manhood.

Mar. 4&6 Hesse: Demian
Discussion/background: Tradition of the adolescent quest myth. Self and Other.
Initiation patterns in literature. Adulthood as spiritual rebirth.

Mar. 11&13 Joyce Carol Oates & James Joyce: Selected short fiction (Handouts)
Discussion/background: The adolescent as 20th-century outsider. Themes of alienation, despair.
The short story as fiction of initiation.

Spring Break

IV. The Adolescent as Problem, as Audience, As
Ethnic Outsider; "Young Adult" Literature, Ethnic
Literature.

- Mar. 25&27 Angelou: I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Discussion/background: Adolescence and the
context of Black American culture. Rites of
passage in Afro-American literature. Race, gender
and adolescence.
- Ap. 1&3 Welch: Fools Crow
Discussion/background: Adolescence and cultural
conflict. Conflicting rituals of initiation.
Ethnic identity and dominant cultural values.
- Ap. 8&10 Salinger: The Catcher in the Rye
Discussion/background: The adolescent as literary
voice. Salinger's novel as prototype of the
"Problem Novel." The adolescent as social critic.
- Ap. 15&17 Three "Problem" Novels
Cormier: I Am the Cheese
Blume: Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret
Zindel: The Pigman
Discussion/background: Defining and evaluating
the problem novel.
Evaluating notions of literature as
"bibliotherapy." Themes of
adults vs. adolescents. The adolescent as case
history.
- Ap. 22 Some views on YA literature. (Handout
articles to be announced)
- Ap. 24-May 2 Oral paper topic presentations
May 2 Last class day. **Final Paper Due**